

THE NURSE IN NERVOUS DISEASES

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AMONG the eras in human history we have heard of the Stone Age, the Iron Age, and even the Dark Ages, but the present era might fitly be termed the "Age of Nervousness."

Nervousness is the characteristic of the American people. Abroad, we are known for our excitability, irritability, and that energy we so lovingly call "strenuousness." Nowhere is the wear and strain of modern life so marked as in this much-achieving nation. The death-rate, as given by leading statistics, shows that it is rapidly increasing. Must our progeny read in the annals of the future that we have become a people of unsettled brains and shattered nerves? Briefly glancing at some of the causes of these maladies, we find, in the beginning, our children coming into the world hampered with a heritage of weakened nerves; then the baby minds overburdened with much thought at a period when they should be free from care; later, school, with its often misdirected teaching, or "cramming;" society, with its gayety and pleasures; business, with its cares and worries, and even religion is pervaded with that spirit of unrest that causes it to be more often a source of evil than of good. By far the most frequent cause, however, will be found to be overwork combined with worry. The professional or business man or woman, after years of close application to work, too often becomes a nervous wreck, and thus their usefulness in life is shortened and their own lives made miserable.

Let us look for a moment at the more common forms of nervous diseases: nervous excitement and weakness, hypochondria, hysteria, and neurasthenia, or "nervous prostration," as it is more frequently called. The latter is perhaps more prevalent, and may be said to include the others in severe cases, and will serve as an example.

Where there is general exhaustion, with brain fatigue, excessive anxiety, marked depression of spirits, sleeplessness, headache, loss of will power, morbid fancies, irascibility, persistent hypochondria, or mild insanity, the poor sufferer often resorts to drugs, thus forming a pernicious habit which must be fought while life lasts. Where there is an overworked nervous system, there will be an exhausted nervous system; the nerve-cells have been robbed of vital force, hence the body suffers from lack of nerve control, and disease manifests itself through derangement of the various organs, as heart, stomach, liver, etc.

What can be done to relieve these most wretched of human beings?

Generally, a change of surroundings, rest, plenty of out-door air and exercise, hygienic living, nourishing food, especially milk; massage and electricity are often beneficial treatments to produce sleep; nerve tonics and sedatives will be prescribed by the physician; these will produce excellent results. But now I come to the theme of my subject—the important part a nurse holds in the recovery of these patients. She should prove the most valuable aid the physician can rely upon. To her he will look for an accurate report of his patient's condition—*i.e.*, symptoms manifested and the action of his remedies and treatments. The doctor may see his patient but a little while each day; to the nurse is entrusted the responsibility of long hours of careful watching and waiting, sometimes for many weeks, before she sees the reward of her toil in the recovery of the patient. How necessary, then, that she should *know how* to faithfully perform her duty to both doctor and patient, to whom she sustains a most intimate relation.

The greatest requisite is that the nurse should constantly exercise over her patient a strong moral influence. As a rule, through the weakened powers of mind and will the patient has lost much of her former faith and courage, and for the nurse to make it real again is no small part performed. The next requirement is a cheerful, serene temperament; untiring patience, "that sweet virtue," with the little whims and peculiarities that may be manifested; kindness and forbearance with ungente tempers and contradictions, and a profound sympathy, which does not weaken, but wins, the patient's confidence and love.

Firmness may often be required, but should it not be accompanied by that clear judgment that comes from "foregoing one's self and one's own ways for love"?

How great a field we have here to inspire these weary and distressed ones with hope and cheer; to uplift the mind that has become shrouded in gloom and despair to higher things, and assist her to again become her own true self. Hard, do you say? Yes, it is hard, but if we have won *one* back from the Slough of Despond, have we not done something for time and eternity and for the Master whom we serve?

How often have I heard the remark from patients' lips, "Yes, I had a nurse, a graduate of such and such hospital, but she did not understand me." How pitiful to be away from home and friends, sick and lonely, and shut up with a nurse who "does not understand"! Is it not our duty as nurses to learn to understand more fully this class of patients, that must sooner or later come under every nurse's hands?

Every nurse is expected to know how to care for acute and surgical cases, and rightly so,—the greater her knowledge of these subjects the

better,—but my plea is for a little more experience, a little more tact and patience, with these poor, helpless, discouraged fellow-beings that are submitted to our care before thrusting ourselves upon a too confiding public as “trained nurses.”

THE NURSE, THE DOCTOR, AND THE PUBLIC *

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“A SOUND mind in a sound body” is a golden gift to both doctor and nurse, but a sound body is even more necessary for the success of the nurse than for that of the doctor, for the exacting physical strain in the work of the nurse is sometimes without relaxation, continuous over days and nights. A good preliminary education and good health are therefore positive essentials to your satisfactory progress.

I have said that education is necessary for your success. You might ask me now: What is success and what is education? If I undertake to answer these questions, it must be in a restricted sense, for to answer them fully would take much learning and an essay on each. Success may mean to different men the attainment of almost opposite ends. All the nobler elements of success to some are swallowed up in the insatiable greed for money; to such there are no ties too dear, no friends too close, to be offered up on the altar of Mammon. Success, then, to be a worthy motive of effort, must be more than the attainment of the object desired; it must presuppose the object desired to be worthy the best effort. To judge, then, of the value of the ideally successful life requires education, and to aspire to an ideally successful life also requires education. This brings me, then, to a brief consideration of education.

Education is regarded by some as the acquirement of a given amount of so-called book-learning; to have stowed away in the different cells of the brain a given amount of arithmetic or chemistry or physics and the like. This is not all there is to education; this is training, and may be very good training; to this class belongs the educated horse. Education must include the development of all the faculties of man, the discipline of character, the enlightenment of the understanding. I can conceive of a man possessing the better elements of education who never saw a book. Man is more than an animal; he is an animal, to be sure, and in that sense alone a brother to the meanest thing that lives, but he is more than

* Extracts from an address given to the graduating class of the Sisters' Hospital, El Paso, Texas.